

Message Text

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SUBJ: VENICE BEINNALE MEETINGS

1. IN LIEU OF A US COMMISSIONER, WILDER GREEN OF IEC, MILTON GENDEL, ROME-BASED ART CRITIC, AND LOIS ROTH, USIS, AMEMBASSY ROME, REPRESENTED THE US AT THE JUNE 3-4 MEETINGS TO DISCUSS THE 1978 BIENNALE.

2. MEETINGS OPENED ON A HIGH NOTE WITH ANNOUNCEMENT BY BIENNALE PRESIDENT THAT THE PREVIOUS EVENING THE GOI HAD FINALLY VOTED BIENNALE BUDGET INCREASING ALLOCATION FROM ONE TO THREE BILLION LIRE AND CHANGING BYLAWS TO THE ADVANTAGE OF BIENNALE PRESIDENT. PRESIDNET RIPA DE MEANA MENTIONED THE FORTY LETTER TOGETHER WITH THE REQUEST OF SEVERAL REPRESENTATIVES TO MEET EARLIER IN YEAR BUT SHE BLAMED THE DELAY ON "CONFUSED SITUATION" RE FUNDING FROM ITALIAN PARLIAMENT. HE ALSO NOTED DESIRE OF BEINNALE DIRECTORATE TO MAINTAIN INTERNATIONAL CHARACTER OF BEINNALE AND "OPEN IN ALL DIRECTIONS," ENCOURAGING ESPECIALLY THIRD WORLD COUNTRIES' PARTICIPATION.

3. A LENTHY REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF VISUAL ARTS AND ARCHITECTURE
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GREGOTTI SUMMARIZED SUCCESSES OF 1976 "NEW" BIENNALE ATTRIBUTING MUCH OF SUCCESS TO FACTOR OF A COMMON THEME, STRESSING NECESSITY OF COMMON THEME FOR NEXT BIENNALE, AND SUGGESTING: 1) "THEATRICALIZATION OF THE VISUAL ARTS" AND 2) "RELATIONSHIP ART-INSTITUTION" FOR 1978. FOREIGN REPRESENTATIVES SPENT BETTER PART OF MORNING SHHOTING DOWN THOSE PROPOSED THEMES.

4. LATER, ISRAELI REPRESENTATIVE PROPOSED ALTERNATE THEMES: "FROM NATURE TO ART AND FROM ART TO NATURE," WHICH MET WITH APPROVAL FROM ALL FOREIGN REPRESENTATIVES, SINCE ALMOST ANY EXHIBIT FITS UNDER SUCH A WIDE RUBRIC. WHILE US REPRESENTATIVES AGREED PRIVATELY THAT THIS THEME IS FLABBY AT BEST, NONETHELESS IT PROVIDES DESIRED BROAD, GENERAL, NON-POLITICAL UMBRELLA AS PER REFTTEL. ONLY DISCOMFORT WITH THIS THEME EXPRESSED BY MEMBERS OF ITALIAN VISUAL ARTS AND ARCHITECTURE SECTION, WHO, WE HAVE REASON TO BELIEVE, HAD ALREADY BEGUN WORK ASSEMBLING EXHIBITS UNDER THE TWO EARLIER PROPOSED THEMES. TO TIE DOWN PROPOSAL, A GROUP OF REPRESENTATIVES DRAFTED SPECIFIC LANGUAGE WHICH WAS PRESENTED AT FINAL SESSION OF MEETINGS. PRESIDENT STRESSED THAT DIRECTORATE OF BIENNALE MUST MAKE FINAL DECISION ABOUT THEME AND PROPOSED NEXT MEETING TAKE PLACE SEPTEMBER 23 AND 24. FOREIGN DELEGATES, STRESSING URGENCY ALONG LINES OF FORTY LETTER, REQUESTED PRESIDENT ADVISE REPRESENTATIVES OF DIRECTORATE'S DECISION TELEGRAPHICALLY NO LATER THAN JUNE 20, TO WHICH PRESIDENT AGREED.

COMMENT: THE US REPRESENTATIVES KEPT WAITING FOR FIRST ONE THEN THE OTHER SHOE TO DROP. NEITHER DID. THE WORD DISSENT WAS MENTIONED ONLY ONCE, IN A BARELY COMPREHENSIBLE SENTENCE BY THE JAPANESE REPRESENTATIVE. WE NOTED THE ABSENCE OF THE SOVIET REPRESENTATIVE, AND TELEGRAMS FROM HUNGARY AND POLAND ATTRIBUTING THEIR ABSENCE TO FORCE MAJEUR. ONLY THE YUGOSLAVS AND ROMANIANS WERE PRESENT FROM EASTERN EUROPE. WHEN QUERYING THE PRESIDENT INFORMALLY ON HOW THE THEME OF DISSENT WAS TO BE HANDLED, IF AT ALL, HE RESPONDED IT WOULD BE HANDLED AS A SEPARATE 1977 BIENNALE EXHIBITION, BUT WOULD PROBABLY NOT OPEN UNTIL THE SPRING OF 1978 SINCE TIME WAS NEEDED "TO PREPARE IT PROPERLY." WE SUSPECT IT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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WILL OPEN IN LATE SPRING AND CONTINUE AFTER THE OFFICIAL 1978 JUNE OPENING. HOW THIS RELATES TO THE REPEATEDLY STRESSED CONCEPT THAT A COMMON THEME IS NECESSARY TO THE SUCCESS OF THE BIENNALE, REMAINS TO BE SEEN. BUT WE NOTE THAT THE PRESIDENT DID NOT HAVE TO SACRIFICE THIS IDEA IN ORDER TO OBTAIN HIS BUDGET AND CHANGE OF BY-LAWS.

5. AN ATMOSPHERE OF TOTAL CORDIALITY AND COOPERATION PREVAILED THESE MEETINGS. WITH THE MINOR EXCEPTION OF IRRITATION EXPRESSED BY MEMBERS OF THE VISUAL ARTS AND ARCHITECTURE SECTION, WHO DID NOT CONSIDER THE ISRAELI PROPOSED THEME WEIGHTY ENOUGH IN SOCIAL CONTENT, IT WAS OBVIOUS THAT EVERYONE PRESENT WANTED PRAISE AGREEMENT ON EVERYTHING. AFTER DISCUSSING THIS WITH SUCH MAINSTAYS OF THE BIENNALE AS FISCHER (DENMARK) AND GALLWITZ (GERMANY) WE ASSUME THAT FOREIGN REPRESENTATIVES WERE TIRED OF FIGHTING AND EITHER WANTED TO GET ON WITH IT OR OUT OF IT.

6. RE CONTENT OF THE US EXHIBIT FOR 1978 WE NOTE REMARKS FROM SEVERAL REPRESENTATIVES ABOUT OUR LAST EXHIBIT. PRAISING ITS

DIDACTIC QUALITY AND INDIVIDUAL WORKS, THEY NONETHELESS CONSIDERED IT SO REMOTE FROM THE THEME AS TO MAKE THE US APPEAR ALOOF AND UNINTERESTED IN THE ENTIRE BIENNALE. WHILE WE APPRECIATE THE PROBLEMS WHICH FACED THE IEC IN 1976 AND ADMIRE THEIR FEAT IN PRODUCING A US EXHIBIT AT ALL, WE URGE THE IEC THIS YEAR TO SEND AN EXHIBIT THAT WILL PLACE THE US CLEARLY NEAR THE CENTER OF THE 1978 THEME.

7. A LIST OF PARTICIPANTS, THE REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF VISUAL ARTS AND ARCHITECTURE, AND THE DRAFT PROPOSAL FOR THE 1978 THEME WILL BE FORWARDED SEPARATELY. GARDNER

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